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OCI No. 3238/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
1 November 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

SUBJECT: Progress of the Coup d'Etat in Saigon
(As of 0800 EST)

1. At 1345 Saigon time today, General Don telephoned General Stilwell, MACV J-3, stating that all the Vietnamese generals were with him at Joint General Staff (JGS) Headquarters and that a coup was under way. Soon after that, reports were received that the coup forces had seized control of such key installations as the defense ministry, the central police station, the communications ministry and the radio station. Coup troops involved in these actions appeared principally to be marine, airborne, and armored elements. [redacted] General Ton That Dinh was the key to the generals' coup; when he agreed, the coup began.

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2. The Presidential Guard barracks were occupied by the coup forces after some slight fighting. The Special Forces compound at Saigon airport was similarly occupied with some fighting. Special Forces Commander Tung was captured as were other pro-Diem figures such as Police Commissioner Tu, Air Force Commander Hien, Airborne Commander Col. Vien, and Marine Commander Khang.

3. Thereafter, seige was laid to the palace and the coup generals began contacting Diem and Nhu by phone, demanding their immediate resignation. The coup generals were seeking a yes or no answer from the president. On the first call to the palace in mid-afternoon Diem allegedly was not present, and General "Big" Minh spoke to Nhu. In order to show Nhu the strength of the coup movement, the various

State Department review completed

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participating generals spoke on the phone. The prisoners, including Colonel Tung, were forced at gun point to tell Nhu the situation. Nhu was then told by General Minh that if he and Diem did not surrender, the palace would receive massive bombardment.

4. General Minh called President Diem again at 1715 Saigon time, but Diem hung up without further comment. Minh at that time was reported to have given orders to bomb the palace. At about the same time there were reports that Diem was preparing to announce imminent surrender, but there has been no firm development on this point as yet. There was also a broadcast from the palace suggesting that Diem was trying to rally support.

5. Coup troops began attacking Gia Long Palace, and expected to take possession by 1900 hours Saigon time. At 1915 hours Saigon time, General Minh was reported to have given Diem one last chance to surrender or face being "blasted off the face of the earth." Commencing at 1900 hours four loud explosions were heard in the vicinity of the palace within a ten-minute period.

6. Earlier in the afternoon, Diem called Ambassador Lodge at 1630 hours Saigon time, asking what was the position of the US. Lodge took refuge in the confusion of the situation and expressed concern for Diem's physical safety. Lodge told Diem that he had heard that the coup leaders had offered Diem and Nhu safe conduct out of the country and he asked Diem about this. Diem's only comment was that he was the Chief of State, that he had tried to do his duty, and that he was trying to reestablish law and order.

7. General Minh says it is planned to have an entirely civilian government replace the present one. Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho and Pham Huy Quat, prominent Dai Viet opposition leader, have so far been designated for this new cabinet. Minh hoped to turn over the government to civilian hands in two or three days. The generals also hope for early recognition of their new government by the US and the Western powers.

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8. The troop movements reported by the generals indicate that all major combat units adjacent to the capital are supporting the coup. Elements of the 5th division north of Saigon, including its headquarters at Bien Hoa, are activitely participating; the 7th division south of the city with headquarters at My Tho, reportedly is also supporting the coup. Two marine battalions from Bien Hoa, one airborne, and one infantry battalion from Vung Tau (Cap St. Jacques), and two airborne battalions from Binh Duong Province just north of Saigon have moved into the city to participate in the coup.

9. The II Corps command in central Vietnam is sympathetic to the coup as are major elements of the IV Corps in the delta; the status of I Corps in the far north is uncertain. The navy apparently was not sympathetic, but seems to have been neutralized. One report states that Navy Commander Quyen has been killed. Air Force elements are participating. Major pro-government forces, including the police, Special Forces, and the Presidential Guard Brigade appear largely to have been neutralized or suppressed except in the immediate palace area. Unless there is some wavering on the part of units participating in the coup, the generals appear to have the situation under control.

10. Careful planning by the coup group is further indicated by reports from several provincial cities that the military appear to be in charge; at Nha Trang leaflets signed by General Minh have already been distributed acclaiming the new government. There are also reports of popular jubilation in the provinces as well as in Saigon.

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